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Companies Offer Commuter Incentives

San Francisco—BCN

Select environmentally-friendly employers in the Bay Area got a boost from the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S.

Department of Transportation last week after being recognized for doing their part to reduce air pollution.

A new environmental initiative recognizes employers who offer commuter incentives to workers in exchange for cleaner air.

The Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative recognized 83 companies on the list called "The Bay Area's Best Workplaces for Commuters," part of a national experiment to improve the environment through an incentive program.

Roughly 147,000 employees have access to commuting benefits such as transit passes, van-pool subsidies, bicycle facilities, onsite day care, and telecommuting opportunities. The list, which was released Thursday on the Commuter Choice Web site, can be accessed at www.commuterchoice.gov.

Included on the list are Yahoo!, Inc., Northern California Human

Resources Association, Bay Area Council, and Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group.

Yahoo!, based in Sunnyvale, reports that employees are satisfied with the commuter benefits, since the company partially reimburses its employees for commuter costs.

"We have a comprehensive program, which gives 25 percent off to workers who use public transit, offers vanpool commuters preferred parking and bike lockers," said Edward Abuor, corporate service manager and commuter coordinator. "The workers love it—it gives people peace of mind in this area, which is highly congested, and they arrive to Yahoo! relaxed and ready to work."

According to the coalition, San Francisco was chosen as the first city to implement the program because progressive companies are based in the city, it has a developed transit system and traffic congestion is a growing problem.

"Our average commuter is spending more than an entire workweek stuck in traffic each

year," said Robyn Snyder, EPA Bay Area Commuter Choice program manager. "Every workday, congestion causes Bay Area commuters to spend more than 155,000 extra hours in traffic - that's 17 years and more than \$1.8 million of wasted productivity every day."

Employers say through the program they save money by retaining satisfied workers and avoiding the expense of building parking lots.

"Currently, the employers are taking 25,000 cars off the road, which translates to 1,400 tons per year of air pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, and volatile organic compounds, all of which impact air quality," said Steve Offutt, program manager of the Commuter Choice Program.

"Our goal is to have 10 times the number of Bay Area employees included in the program, which would save the equivalent of 70 million gallons of gas," Offutt said.

The coalition hopes to expand the Commuter Choice program to a handful of cities next year.